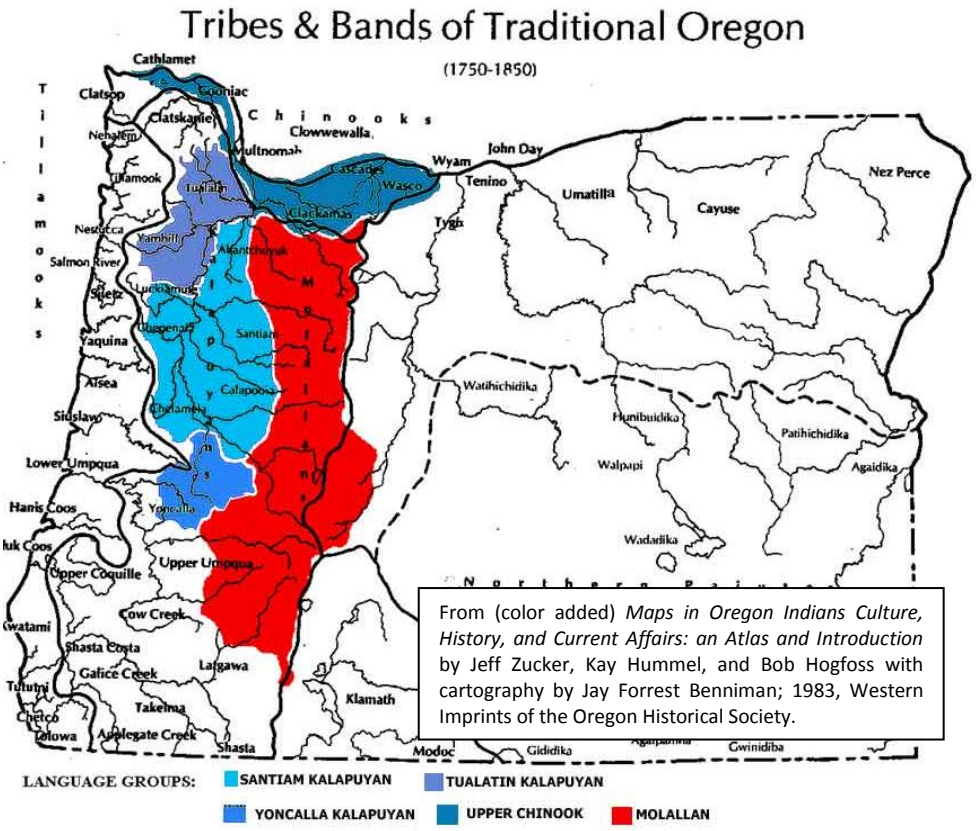
***The First People of Clackamas and Milwaukie***

Before contact with Europeans and Americans, the people of the Pacific Northwest numbered perhaps a million and were divided into several major language groups, scores of dialects, and politically independent households, bands, and villages, ranging from small groups of horse-riding nomads on the Columbia Plateau to large and permanent villages, typically of 30 to 100 people, toward the coast and in the rich inland valleys.




From (color added) *Maps in Oregon Indians Culture, History, and Current Affairs: an Atlas and Introduction* by Jeff Zucker, Kay Hummel, and Bob Hogfoss with cartography by Jay Forrest Benniman; 1983, Western Imprints of the Oregon Historical Society.

Most bands spent much of the year migrating over a large region to exploit the Valley's food supply. In early spring they would make forays from winter villages to gather the first shoots of camas roots. By summer, they would be living in temporary camps to fish, hunt, and gather wapato, camas bulbs, acorns, nuts, and berries. Come the fall, they would burn prairies to harvest tarweed seed and they would catch and preserve the last runs of salmon. As winter set-in, the Oregon Indians would return to their permanent villages and celebrate traditional culture around the fire in the cedar lodges. Elders would tell the legends and myths that explained the people's way of life and passed its values and morals to the children.

None of the Willamette Valley tribes practiced agriculture, but they were not nomadic hunter-gatherers. Fisheries provided an abundant source of food along with game animals, seasonal flocks of birds, and over 100 edible varieties of plants. These first people had developed a sophisticated culture that included a hierarchy of status; harvesting and storage techniques; specialized occupations; a system of trade; and permanent homes.

Oregon Native Americans did not regard themselves as part of a large political or linguistic group but instead identified with their local band of 10 to 80 people connected by blood or marriage. Occasionally there were alliances and territorial wars, but generally there was little conflict with neighboring bands other than skirmishes over marriage alliances, honor, or resources. The area that would become Clackamas County was home to over a dozen bands or villages classified by language into three groups: Kalapuyan, Upper Chinookan, and Molallan.

The KALAPUYAS occupied the valleys to the west of the Willamette River below Willamette Falls, and the tributaries on both sides of the Willamette River above the falls.

The CLACKAMAS, or Upper Chinooks, resided below Willamette Falls along the Willamette and Clackamas Rivers, and along the Columbia River from Celilo Falls nearly to the coast. The Clackamas were roughly divided into the Multnomah west of the Willamette River, the Clowwewalla around the Willamette Falls, as well as the area east of the Willamette on the valleys of the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers.

The MOLALLAS held the upland valleys and western slopes of the Cascade Mountains, and often travelled north to the Columbia River Dalles for trade and regularly welcomed Klamath visitors from the south.

**THE CLACKAMAS PEOPLE**

For the Clackamas people, the rivers were at the heart of their way of life. The great salmon runs both required and allowed a large settled population; the limited time for harvest required a great many hands for labor and the prized fishing sites needed warriors for protection from invaders. Even after Americans settled at Oregon City, the local Indians continued to supply the fish.

Typical of Upper Chinook settlements, the Clackamas villages were substantial and permanent. Each cedar plank lodge could house 20 to 30 people and a village population could be in the hundreds. The fishing villages also became regional trading centers. The Upper Chinook, without migrating themselves, acquired shells, beads, blankets, and seafood from the coast, obsidian, game and plant foods from the southern interior, plus horses, furs, and pipestone from beyond the Cascade Mountains. A huge Indian trading network stretched from Northern California to Alaska, from the Pacific Coast to beyond the Bitterroot Mountains. European goods, especially useful metal tools and utensils, passed quickly into this network; these items found their way to Indians who had never seen whites.

Like the neighboring Kalapuya and Upper Chinooks, both men and women wore leather leggings and tunics, with the tunics of the women cut wider in the sleeves and longer in the skirt. Pounded cedar bark made a type of cloth for short skirts or sleeping mats. Elaborate beadwork, quill, feather, and shell decorations adorned the clothing of the wealthy. The beautifully decorated, but practical, beaded leggings continued to be worn long after Indian women adopted European-style dresses.

**THE END OF THE CLACKAMAS**

Coastal Chinooks like the Clackamas had the earliest contact with European and American explorers and traders and were the most devastated by years of plagues like smallpox and malaria that first arrived in the 1780's. Within a few decades, disease and dispersal took their toll and by the time of the first emigration on the Oregon Trail in 1841 very few of Clackamas County's first people remained in tiny pockets near white communities.

In the fall of 1851, some Clackamas Indians signed a general treaty with Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs Anson Dart ceding their Willamette Valley land. Dart's plan included small local reservations but was never ratified by Congress. On January 10, 1855, the remaining 88 people who identified as Clackamas signed a treaty that ceded all lands including Oregon City and Milwaukie as well as the lower Willamette, Sandy, and Clackamas valleys in exchange for a ten-year annuity of $2,500. After the treaty was ratified March 3, 1855 the Clackamas were to relocate to the Grand Ronde Reservation while retaining some rights in their former homeland. In the midst of violence and starvation during the Yakima War in the summer of 1855, Clackamas area Indians were suddenly rounded up and forced to the reservation. The annuity was never paid.

Most Willamette Valley Natives relocated to the Grand Ronde Reservation in the 1850's and by the 1950's, the last generation of Kalapuya speakers was gone and the survivors at Grand Ronde adopted Chinook Jargon as a common language. Reservation life mingled the remnants of many tribes and today descendants of the Clackamas are part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, a community of five tribes (Kalapuya, Molalla, Umpqua, Chasta, and Rogue River) that preserves a common culture in a place far from their traditional lands.

*This narrative compiles excerpts from "At the End of the Trail: Clackamas County Oregon" by Patricia Kohnen and has been edited with the permission of the author. Visit http://www.usgennet.org/usa/or/county/clackamas for the full narrative.*